

able to pass an infallible judgment upon any plant from Clematis to Quillwort. Fortunately, this day of smattering seems to be passing away, and systematists, even among phanerogams, are confining their attention more and more to certain groups. The consequence must be a more exhaustive study of these groups, an elaboration of all possible means of classification based upon minute as well as gross structures, a complete disentangling of synonymy, and establishing all claims of priority—in short, that detailed presentation of the subject which is necessary if systematic botany proposes to be a progressive science. Even now manuals are not the work of one man, and they will become less and less so, until the best manual will be a very composite affair in the matter of authorship. It is commonly supposed by the uninitiated that every botanist who is more or less well known can unerringly determine “off-hand” any plant that is presented to him. It would be far more comfortable for some botanists if the “uninitiated” could be made to understand that this is an entirely false supposition. Of course, there is a host of plants that every botanist knows, but such are not the ones most frequently thrust at him. He is called upon to decide upon critical cases—some species, for instance, in a difficult genus of most perplexing species. The confession might as well be made that every botanist, however well-informed, has to “dig out” all such plants from the books, and is in no case ready with an “off hand” opinion except in the group which he may just then be studying. A man may even have written a monograph, but presently he will have to use it in the determination of plants like any one else. There has been an astonishing amount of careless “off-hand” naming done by botanists whose names carry weight, and who blundered for the simple reason that they were not familiar with the subject. Specializing avoids all this, and critical points should always be submitted to some botanist who is paying special attention to the group. A botanist should no sooner think of sending a Composite to a man chiefly familiar with *Carex* than a zoölogist now thinks of sending a Sea-urchin to a specialist in Crustacea.

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## OPEN LETTERS.

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### Is the strawberry poisonous?

In reference to Prof. Prentiss' “open letter” under the above title (this volume, p. 19), the cases recorded are evidently pure idiosyncrasies, due not in the least to the peculiarity of the fruit, but to the peculiarity of the sufferer. The precise nature of these idiosyncrasies is very obscure, but they are certainly not due to mental influences, and the interesting circumstance that in the first case the rash always commenced *behind the ears* is evidence that irritation was caused to the ends of the pneumogastric nerve, which is connected with the skin only by a twig

supplying the tissue at the back of the ear. A similar case has been reported to me on excellent authority, and is corroborated fully by the sufferer himself, of a rash being invariably developed in a boy after eating oatmeal, but in this instance it was unaccompanied by any alarming symptoms. A somewhat different case of idiosyncrasy is recorded in *The Lancet* (February 28, 1888, p. 394), in which a negro woman in Barbadoes experienced the most alarming symptoms after an ordinary dose of cocaine.

West Cliff, Colorado.

THEO. D. A. COCKRELL.

#### Botanical expedition to S. America.

As various inquiries are made in regard to the botanical expedition to South America which I am contemplating, I feel at liberty to say a word in this public way about the matter.

The plan is to start at Buenos Ayres, in the Argentine Republic, ascend the Paraguay and Parana rivers as far as possible, and to collect the water and land plants in the surrounding region along the southern boundary of Bolivia and southwestern boundary of Brazil.

Attempts will be made to explore the tributaries of the great water system which empties through the Rio de la Plata into the Atlantic. Subsequently the Argentine Republic will be crossed westerly to the Andes, and a visit made to Chili, with attempts to collect the little known flora of the desert of Atacama.

Of course, these plans are liable to be modified by circumstances, but it is hoped that a large and rare collection of the South American flora of the regions visited may be made and brought home to enrich the herbaria of our country.

If further information as to the disposal of the sets collected is desired, letters may be addressed to the writer up to the 1st of June next, or to Dr. N. L. Britton, of Columbia College, New York.

Ashland, Mass.

THOMAS MORONG.

#### Report of the U. S. Mycologist for 1887.

Into the portion of this report which concerns California several errors have crept that are to be regretted. All the fungi mentioned as having been observed for the first time in California exist in my herbarium, from numerous localities. *Uromyces Betae* and *Puccinia prunifolia* were collected by me in 1876, and are included in *Cat. of Cal. Fungi*, published as long ago as 1880. *Peronosporia viticola*, an account of which, with some localities, was given in *Bull. Cal. Acad.*, No. 7, June, 1887, abounds in California on our wild vine, *Vitis Californica*, and the denial of its existence by the U. S. mycologist will be productive of very mischievous results if it prevents our vine-growers from taking measures to protect themselves from this dreaded pest already in our midst.

San Francisco.

H. W. HARKNESS.

To the members of the Botanical Club of the A. A. A. S.

Your committee, appointed in August last, to devise a method for the exchange of specimens among American botanists, have, after consultations with other botanists, decided that the most practical method is through the herbarium of the Department of Agriculture at Washington.